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Meetings' Notes Show the Unvarnished Haig

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It is 8:30 on the morning of Jan. 18. Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr., at the head of the table in his seventh-floor State Department conference room, is speaking. This is his regular senior staff meeting, and he is reviewing a four-day trip he just completed in the Middle East. The picture he paints of U.S. prospects in that region is grim.

Despite his public optimism over the continuation of the Camp David peace process after Israel's scheduled April return of the Sinai to Egypt, Haig has come back convinced that once the Sinai transfer takes place the delicate web that ties Israel and Egypt together will unravel quickly, and as a result Washington will be the loser.

"Egypt will go back in to [the] Arab world with [the] U.S. isolated as Israel's sole defender," Haig says, according to notes taken by one participant at this Jan. 18 meeting.

This is a much grimmer assessment on U.S. prospects in the Middle East than Haig has ever given publicly or even as the anonymous senior official traveling on and speaking from his airplane.

Noting that his efforts in travels throughout the region should not be misinterpreted as a repeat of former secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger's whirlwind shuttle diplomacy of the early 1970s, Haig says, "I didn't go over to pull a rabbit out of the hat a la Kissinger. This secretary of state is not putting on Kissinger's fedora."

Notes taken by one of the people present at nearly two dozen regular senior staff meetings over the last year have been obtained by The Washington Post and verified, as to general content, with two other participants.

These notes record dozens of Haig's private and apparently candid pronouncements on the serious foreign policy issues of the day.

During these conversations with his top staffers Haig makes many statements previously unknown

to the public, on topics ranging from the Middle East, our European allies, the Soviet Union, China and Poland to Haig's difficulties in dealing with White House decision makers, conservative ideologues in the Republican Party and the latest news leaks.

In all, the notes provide a behind-the-scenes portrait of a secretary of state who talks even tougher in private than in public. On Oct. 15, for example, Haig calls British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington a "duplicious bastard" for his handling of one Middle East matter.

There are dozens of meetings, perhaps as many as 100, for which The Post does not have the notes, so the picture that emerges is incomplete. Haig has been a controversial figure in Washington since his days in the Nixon administration as White House chief of staff, and many have questioned his outspoken and sometimes volatile nature. At the same time many are strong admirers, including President Reagan. Both critics and ad-

mirers will find evidence in the material to support their views of the man.

Those who normally attend the regular weekday morning meeting include the deputy secretary of state, the four undersecretaries, the assistant secretaries for congressional relations and public affairs and the heads of various offices, such as intelligence. In addition, several members of Haig's personal staff are regularly there.

The notes show Haig as a man who is knowledgeable and deeply concerned about foreign affairs, possessed of a cynical view of the Soviets and desiring continuity in American foreign policy with adherence to previous commitments.

The notes also show Haig's admiration for Reagan's ability to charm and influence others. In the Oct. 15 meeting, after receiving a pessimistic forecast on winning congressional approval of the proposed Saudi airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft sale, Haig says of the prospects of turning it around: "The only way is presidential one-on-ones."

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